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SUBJECT: IMET: Positive Results, Tiny Impact

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The International Military Education and Training (IMET) program continues to be an integral component of U.S. engagement with Vietnam, providing opportunities to improve the professionalism of the Vietnamese military, as well as to expose a young generation of officers to the U.S. thinking on defense and security. However, current fiscal year funding of \$195K -- enough to fund English-language training in the U.S. for six Vietnamese officers annually -- is inadequate given the needs of the 450,000-strong Vietnamese military force and its long-term potential to serve as a reliable security partner in the region. Additional IMET funding for FY 2011 and FY 2012 would allow the USG to enhance English language competence, professionalize Government of Vietnam (GVN) forces, increase interoperability with U.S. and other friendly forces, and enhance Vietnam's ability to participate in GPOI and other multilateral defense and security efforts. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Since the IMET program began in Vietnam in 2005, 42 students have received training, primarily in English language training for junior and mid-level officers. In FY 2009, the total IMET allocation for Vietnam was \$195,000 -- enough funding to send three Vietnamese officers to attend nine weeks of specialized English language training; of these, two continued with twelve weeks of electronics training and one followed with thirty weeks of weather forecast training. Another three officers attended English language training and English language instructor training. The remaining funds were not sufficient to send another student to training, and so were used to purchase English language training publications.

¶3. (SBU) During his meeting with the Deputy Secretary in Hanoi on September 27, Vietnamese Defense Minister General Phung Quang Thanh expressed his appreciation for IMET funding as an integral part of the GVN's commitment to professionalizing Vietnam's military force. Defense Minister Thanh also asked the USG to consider increasing IMET funding to strengthen Vietnam's on-going professionalization efforts, noting that English language skills were key to preparing Vietnam to expand its participation in regional and eventually global security operations, including peacekeeping. Citing the roughly 1,000 military officials Australia has trained in English, the Deputy Director General of the MFA's Americas Department, Mr. Le Huy Hoang separately told poloff that Vietnam would like to have "many, many more Vietnamese military officials with American accents."

¶4. (SBU) The Deputy Director of MOD's External Relations Department, Senior Colonel Thang, regularly points out that the inability of Vietnamese officers to communicate directly in English with other nations' militaries hinders MOD's ability to participate actively in GPOI, as well as regional exercises and training. The

Director of the Office of Government International Cooperation Department, Mr. Bui Huy Hung, has echoed this opinion, stating that English is the primary pre-condition for participation in GPOI, as many senior officials cannot gain needed training in working directly with other militaries and exposure to international service without English language capability.

¶5. (SBU) In a recent meeting with the Vietnam Marine Police (VMP), the Director of International Relations, Senior Captain Phu Van Lam, proudly shared that Vietnam actively participates in ReCAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia) through its 24-7 Information Sharing Center. However, he noted that staffing is an issue because all communications and reporting are conducted in English. The VMP Deputy General Director, Senior Captain Tran Duc Hung, added that the VMP would like to expand its cooperation with other nations in the region, but until his officers can communicate in English, the VMP remains largely on the sidelines.

¶6. (SBU) Vietnam lacks a cadre of officers who speak English and who have been exposed to the U.S., since mil-mil engagement is relatively recent. While Australia's effort to train a limited number of Vietnamese military officers in English is consistent with our larger goals, training in Australia does little to build relations between the U.S. and Vietnamese militaries. As our relationship with the VMP and other components of the MOD develop, we would also like to expand training into specialized areas such as military medicine, communications, and engineering -- all to complement our current efforts to bring Vietnam's military capacity up to par with others in the region so that they might become a more active, contributing partner. Further, the MOD repeated a request during the most recent Bilateral Defense Dialogue for opportunities to send more senior level military officers to U.S. military command and staff colleges. We concur that such an experience would be invaluable for both the officer and the potential benefit to the U.S., to send one officer to such a course would cost approximately \$65K -- one-third of last year's IMET budget.

¶7. (SBU) IMET's benefits to the U.S. and host nation militaries are well known. Post appreciates that an increasing number of partners and potential partners are vying for a limited pool of IMET resources. That said, senior USG and GVN officials recently have reaffirmed the importance that both nations attach to deepening security and defense relations, and agree that IMET is an important tool to achieve this goal. As the Department and other interested agencies examine IMET funding for FYs 2011 and 2012, we encourage you to look for opportunities to allocate additional IMET funding for Vietnam at levels commensurate with Vietnam's potential as a key regional partner to achieve our long-term bilateral and regional goals.

Palmer